

# The Mystery of the Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

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(Continued From Last Sunday.)

Mathieu was removed from the court. Rouletabille went on:

"Since she has made this confession, I am free to tell you that she often met the keeper at night on the first floor of the donjon, in the room which was once an oratory. These meetings became more frequent when her husband was laid up by his rheumatism. She gave him morphine to ease his pain and to give herself more time for the meetings. Madame Mathieu came to the chateau that night, enveloped in a large black shawl, which served also as a disguise. This was the phantom that disturbed Daddy Jacques. She knew how to imitate the moving of Mother Angouleme's cat, and she would make the cries to advise the keeper of her presence. The recent repairs of the donjon did not interfere with their meetings in the keeper's old room in the donjon, since the new room assigned to him at the end of the right wing was separated from the steward's room by a partition only.

"Previous to the tragedy in the court Madame Mathieu and the keeper left the donjon together. I learnt these facts from my examination of the footmarks on the floor in the morning. Bernier, the concierge, whom I had stationed behind the donjon—as he will explain himself—could not see what passed in the court. He did not reach the court until he heard the revolver shot, and then he fled. When the woman parted from the man she went towards the open gate of the court, while he returned to his room.

"He had almost reached the door when the revolver rang out. He had just reached the corner when a shadow bounded by. Meanwhile, Madame Mathieu, surprised by the revolver shot and by the entrance of people into the court, crouched in the darkness. The court is a large one, and being near the gate, she might easily have passed unseen. But she remained and saw the body being carried away. In great agony of mind she heard the vestibule and saw the dead body of her lover on the stretcher. Daddy Jacques' lanterns. She then fled, and Daddy Jacques joined her.

"That same night, before the murder, Daddy Jacques had been awakened by the cat's cry, and, looking through his window, had seen the black phantom. Hastily dressing himself he went out and recognized her. He is an old friend of Madame Mathieu, and when she saw him she had to tell him of her relations with the keeper, and begged his assistance. Daddy Jacques, who was a man of action, accompanied her through the oak grove out of the park, past the border of the lake to the road to Epinay. From there it was but a very short distance to her home.

"Daddy Jacques returned to the chateau, and, seeing how important it was for Madame Mathieu's presence at the chateau to remain unknown, he had done all he could to hide it. I appeal to Monsieur Larsan, who saw the footprints of the murderer, to tell me if he had seen any other footprints.

Here Rouletabille, turning towards Madame Mathieu, with a bow, said:

"The footprints of Madame Bernier resemble those to the near footprints of the murderer."

Madame Mathieu trembled and looked at him with wide eyes as if in wonder at what he would say next.

"Madame has a shapely foot; long and rather large for a woman. The imprint with its pointed toe, is very like that of the murderer."

A movement in the court was repressed by Rouletabille. He held their attention at once.

"I hasten to add," he went on, "that I attach no importance to this. Out-

ward signs like these are often liable to lead us into error, if we do not reason rightly. Monsieur Robert Darzac's footprints are also like the murderer's, and yet he is not the murderer."

The president, turning to Madame Mathieu, asked:

"Is that in accordance with what you know occurred?"

"Yes, Monsieur President," she replied. "It is as Monsieur Rouletabille had been behind us."

"Did you see the murderer running towards the end of the right wing?"

"Yes, as clearly as I saw them afterwards carrying the keeper's body."

"What became of the murderer?"

"You were in the court and could easily have seen."

"I saw nothing of him, Monsieur President. It became quite dark just then."

"Then Monsieur Rouletabille," said the president, "must explain how the murderer made his escape."

Rouletabille continued:

"It was impossible for the murderer to escape by the way he had entered the court without our seeing him. We could not see him we must certainly have felt him, since the court is a very narrow one inclosed in high iron railings."

"Then if the man was hemmed in that narrow square, how is it you did not find him?" I have been asking you that for the last hour."

"Monsieur President," replied Rouletabille, "I cannot answer that question before half-past six."

By this time the people in the court were beginning to believe in this new witness. They were amused by his melodramatic action in thus fixing the hour; but they seemed to have confidence in the outcome. As for the president, it looked as if he also had made up his mind to take the young man in the same way. He had certainly been impressed by Rouletabille's explanation of Madame Mathieu's part.

"Well, Monsieur Rouletabille," he said, "as you say, but don't let us say any more of you before half-past six."

Rouletabille bowed to the president, and made his way to the door of the witnesses' room.

I quietly made my way through the crowd and left the court almost at the same time as Rouletabille. He greeted me heartily, and looked happy.

"I'll not ask you, my dear fellow," I said, smiling, "what you've been doing in America; because I've no doubt you'll say you can't tell me until after half-past six."

"No, my dear Sainclair, I'll tell you right now why I went to America. I went in search of the name of the other half of the murderer."

"The name of the other half?"

"Exactly. When we last left the Glandier I knew there were two halves to the murderer and the name of only one of them. I went to America for the name of the other half."

I was too puzzled to answer. Just then we entered the witnesses' room, and Rouletabille was immediately surrounded. He showed himself very friendly to all except Arthur Bernier, to whom he exhibited a marked coldness of manner. Frederic Larsan came in also. Rouletabille went up and shook him heartily by the hand. His manner toward the detective showed that he had got the better of the police man. Larsan smiled and asked him what he had been doing in America. Rouletabille began by telling him some anecdotes of his voyage. They then turned aside together, apparently with the object of speaking confidentially. I therefore discreetly left them and, being curious to hear the evidence, returned to my seat in the courtroom, where the public plainly showed its lack of interest in what was going on in their impatience for

Rouletabille's return at the appointed time.

On the stroke of half-past six Joseph Rouletabille was again brought in. It was impossible for him to plot the same excitement which appeared on every face, as he made his way to the bar. Darzac rose to his feet, frantically pale.

The president, addressing Rouletabille, said gravely:

"I will not ask you to take the oath, because you have not been regularly summoned; but I trust there is no need to urge upon you the gravity of the statement you are about to make."

Rouletabille looked the president quite calmly and steadily in the face, and replied:

"Yes, monsieur."

"At your last appearance here," said the president, "we had arrived at the point where you were to tell us how the murderer escaped, and also his name. Now, Monsieur Rouletabille, we await your explanation."

"Very well, monsieur," began my friend, with a profound silence. "I had explained how it was impossible for the murderer to get away without being seen. And yet he was there with us in the court."

"And you did not see him? At least that is what the prosecution declares."

"Not we all of us saw him, Monsieur President," cried Rouletabille.

"Then why was he not arrested?"

"Because no one, besides myself, knew that he was the murderer. It would have been impossible to believe in him had he arrested, and I had no proof other than my own reasoning. I was convinced we had the murderer before us and that we were actually looking at him. I have now brought what I consider the indisputable proof."

"Speak out, monsieur! Tell us the murderer's name."

"You will find it on the list of names present in the court on the night of the tragedy," replied Rouletabille.

The people present in the courtroom began showing impatience. Some of them even called for the name, and were silenced by the usher.

The list includes Daddy Jacques, Bernier, the concierge, and Mr. Arthur Bernier, said the president. "Do you accuse any of these?"

"No, monsieur!"

"Then I do not understand what you are driving at. There was no other person in the court."

"Yes, monsieur, there was, not at the end, but above the court, who was leaning out of the window."

"Do you mean Frederic Larsan?" exclaimed the president.

"Yes," Frederic Larsan replied Rouletabille in a ringing tone. "Frederic Larsan is the murderer!"

The courtroom became immediately filled with loud and indignant protest. So astonished was he that the president did not attempt to quiet it. The quick silence which followed was broken by the distinctly whispered words from the lips of Robert Darzac:

"It's impossible! He's mad!"

"You dare to accuse Frederic Larsan, monsieur?" asked the president. "If you are not mad, what are your proofs?"

"Proofs, monsieur?—Do you want proofs? Well, here is one," cried Rouletabille, shrilly. "Let Frederic Larsan be called!"

"Usher, call Frederic Larsan."

The usher hurried to the side door, opened it, and disappeared. The door remained open, while all eyes turned expectantly towards the park, as he appeared and, stepping forward, said:

"Monsieur President, Frederic Larsan is not here. He left at about 4 o'clock and has not been seen since."

"That is my proof!" cried Rouletabille, triumphantly.

"Explain yourself," demanded the president.

"My proof is Larsan's flight," said the young reporter. "He will not come back. You will see no more of Frederic Larsan."

"Unless you are playing with the court, monsieur, why did you not accuse him when he was present? He would then have answered you."

"He could give no other answer than the one he has now given by his flight."

"We cannot believe that Larsan has fled. There was no reason for his doing so. Did he know you'd make this charge?"

"He did. I told him I would."

"Do you dare to accuse that knowing Larsan was the murderer who gave him the opportunity to escape?"

"Yes, Monsieur President, I did," replied Rouletabille, proudly. "I am not a policeman, I am a journalist; and my business is to tell the people the truth, and is not that of an executioner. If you are just, monsieur, you will see that I am right. You can now understand why I refrained until this hour to divulge the name. I gave Larsan time to catch the train for Paris, where he would know where to hide himself, and leave no traces. You will not find Frederic Larsan," declared Rouletabille, fixing his eyes on Monsieur Robert Darzac.

He is too cunning. He is a man who has always escaped you and whom you have long searched for in vain. If he did not succeed in outwitting me, he can yet easily outwit any police. This man who, four years ago, introduced himself to the Glandier, became celebrated as Frederic Larsan, is notorious under another name—a name well known to crime. Frederic Larsan, Monsieur President, is Bailmeyer!"

who were conducting him to court. It was known later that, in spite of the keen hunt after him by the most expert of detectives, he had sat that same evening at a first performance in the Theatre Francaise, without the slightest disguise.

He left France, later, to "work" America. The police there succeeded in once capturing him, but the extraordinary man escaped the next day. It would need a volume to recount the adventures of this master-criminal.

And yet this was the man Rouletabille had allowed to get away! Knowing all about him and who he was, he afforded the criminal an opportunity for another laugh at the society he had defied. I could not help admiring the bold stroke of the young journalist, because I felt certain his motive had been both to protect Mademoiselle Stangeron and rid Darzac of an enemy at the same time.

The crowd had barely recovered from the effect of the astonishing revelation when the hearing was resumed. The question in everybody's mind was: Admitting that Larsan was the murderer, how did he get out of the Yellow Room?

Rouletabille was immediately called to the bar and his examination continued.

"You have told us," said the president, "that it was impossible to escape from the end of the court. Since Larsan was leaning out of his window, he had left the court. How did he do that?"

"He escaped by a most unusual way. He climbed the wall, sprang onto the terrace, and, while we were engaged with the keeper's body, reached the gallery by the window. He then had little else to do than to open the window, get in and call out to us, as if he had just come from his own room. To a man of Bailmeyer's strength all that was mere child's play. And here, monsieur, is the proof of what I say."

Rouletabille drew from his pocket a small packet, from which he produced a strong iron peg.

"This, monsieur," he said, "is a spike which perfectly fits a hole at the base of the cornice supporting the terrace. Larsan, who thought and prepared for everything in case of any emergency, had fixed this spike into the cornice. All he had to do to make his escape good was to plant one foot on a stone which is placed at the corner of the chateau, another on this support, one hand on the cornice of the keeper's door and the other on the terrace, and Larsan was clear of the ground. The rest was easy. His action after dinner as if he had been drugged was made believe. He

was not drugged; but he did drug me. Of course, he had to make it appear as if he also had been drugged so that no suspicion should fall on him for my condition. Had I not been thus overpowered, Larsan would never have entered Mademoiselle Stangeron's chamber that night, and the attack on her would not have taken place."

A groan came from Darzac, who appeared to be unable to control his suffering.

"You can understand," added Rouletabille, "that Larsan would have himself hampered from the fact that my room was so close to his, and from a suspicion that I would be on the watch that night. Naturally, he could not for a moment believe that I suspected him. Yet for some reason I suspected him, and I might have been about to go to Mademoiselle Stangeron. He waited till I was asleep, and my friend Sainclair was busy trying to make me see that my eyes could see him as my pure reason saw him."

"What do you mean by your pure reason?" asked the president.

"My pure reason pointed to him. That was why I watched him. But I was very cunning. I saw pure reason pointed to him; but I required tangible proof so that my eyes could see him as my pure reason saw him."

"What do you mean by your pure reason?" asked the president.

"That power of one's mind which admits of no disturbing elements to a conclusion. The day following the incident of 'the inexplicable gallery,' I felt myself losing control of it. I allowed myself to be diverted by fallacious evidence, but I recovered and again took hold of the right end. I satisfied myself that the murderer could not have left the gallery, either naturally or supernaturally. I narrowed the field of consideration to that small circle, as to a circle. The murderer could not be outside that circle. Now who were in it? There was, first, the murderer. Then there were Daddy Jacques, Monsieur Stangeron, Frederic Larsan, and myself. Every person in the court, in the murderer's room, and in the gallery, there were but four. Now, since it had been demonstrated to me that the fifth could not have escaped, it was evident that one of the four present in the gallery must be a doublet. He must be himself and the murderer also. Why had I not seen this before? Simply because the phenomenon of the double personality had not occurred before in this inquiry."

"Now who of the four persons in the gallery was both that person and the assassin? I went over in my mind what I had seen. I had seen at one and the same time, Monsieur Stangeron and the murderer, Daddy Jacques and the murderer, myself and the murderer, so that the murderer, then, could not be either Monsieur Stangeron, Daddy Jacques or myself. Had I seen Frederic Larsan and the murderer at the same time?—Not—Two seconds had passed, during which I lost sight of the murderer, for, as I have noted in my papers, he arrived two seconds before Monsieur Stangeron, Daddy Jacques, and myself at the meeting point of the two galleries. That would have given Larsan time to go through the 'off-turning' gallery, snatch off his false beard, return, and hurry with us as if, like us, in pursuit of the murderer. I was sure now I had got hold of the right end in my reasoning. With Frederic Larsan, who was always associated in my mind, the personality of the unknown of whom I was in pursuit—the murderer, in other words."

"That revelation staggered me. I tried to regain my balance by going over the evidences previously traced, but which had diverted my mind and led me away from Frederic Larsan. What were these evidences?"

"First, I had seen the unknown in Mademoiselle Stangeron's chamber. On going to Frederic Larsan's room I had found Larsan sound asleep."

"Second, the ladder."

"Third, I had placed Frederic Larsan at the end of the 'off-turning' gallery and had told him that I would rush into Mademoiselle Stangeron's room and try to capture the murderer. Then I returned to Mademoiselle Stangeron's chamber, where I had seen the unknown."

"The first evidence did not disturb me much. It is likely that when I descended from my ladder after having seen the unknown in Mademoiselle Stangeron's chamber, Larsan had already finished what he was doing there. Then, while I was re-entering the chateau, Larsan went back to his own room and, undressing himself, went to sleep."

"Nor did the second evidence trouble me. If Larsan were the murderer, he could have no use for the ladder, but the ladder might have been placed there to give an appearance to the murderer's entrance into the chateau; especially as Larsan had accused Darzac and Darzac was not in the chateau that night. Further, the ladder might have been used to facilitate Larsan's flight in case of absolute necessity."

"But the third evidence puzzled me altogether. Having placed Larsan at the end of the 'off-turning' gallery, I could not explain how he had taken advantage of the moment when I had gone to the left wing of the chateau to find Monsieur Stangeron and Daddy Jacques, to return to Mademoiselle Stangeron's room. It was a very dangerous thing to do. He risked being captured—and he knew it. And he had no time to regain his post, as he had certainly hoped to do. He had then a very strong reason for returning to his room. As for myself, when I called Daddy Jacques to the end of the 'right' gallery, I naturally thought that Larsan was still at his post. Daddy Jacques, in going to his post, had not looked, when he passed, to see whether Larsan was at his post or not."

"What, then, was the urgent reason which had compelled Larsan to go to the room a second time? I guessed it to be some evidence of his presence there. He had left something very important in that room. What was it? And had he recovered it? I begged Madame Bernier, who was accustomed to clean the room to look, and she found a pair of eyeglasses—this pair, Monsieur President!"

And Rouletabille drew the eyeglasses, of which we know, from his pocket.

"When I saw these eyeglasses," he continued, "I was utterly nonplussed. I had never seen Larsan wear eyeglasses. What did they mean? Suddenly I exclaimed to myself: 'Wonder if he is long-sighted?' I had never seen Larsan write. He might then, be long-sighted. They would certainly know at the Surete, and also know if the glasses were his. Such evidence would be damning. That explained Larsan's return. I know now

that Larsan, or Bailmeyer, is long-sighted and that these glasses belonged to him."

"I now made one mistake. I was not satisfied with the evidence I had obtained. I wished to see the man's face. Had I refrained from this, the second terrible attack would not have occurred."

"But," asked the president, "why should Larsan go to Mademoiselle Stangeron's room at all? Why

should he twice attempt to murder her?"

"Because he loves her, Monsieur President."

"That is certainly a reason, but—"

"It is the only reason. He was madly in love, and because of that, and—other things, he was capable of committing any crime."

"Did Mademoiselle Stangeron know this?"

"(To Be Continued Next Sunday.)"

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